DANTE SEXCENTENARY LECTURES

I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DANTE

THE object of this lecture is to make clear the main movements and forces in the midst of which Dante's life unfolded itself. The lecture aims to recall to mind the chief features of his career, with special reference to the parallel events of his time.

In what age, then, and what places did Dante run his course of life? Dante was born in Florence in 1265, and died at Ravenna in 1321. His span of life was thus fifty-six years, thirty-five of which fell in the thirteenth century and twenty-one in the fourteenth. Dante's most impressionable years, the years in which his fundamental conceptions of life, his tastes and habits were acquired and formed, were those of the late thirteenth century, the last, and the greatest century of the Middle Ages, as it is often called by enthusiastic admirers. Dante's early manhood, his romantic love for Beatrice, which so profoundly colored all his life, his marriage with Gemma Donati, his earliest achievements, poetical and political, the composition of the "Vita Nuova," and his service on the city council also fell in this last century of the Middle Ages, more particularly in its last decade, from 1290 to 1300. In the first two decades of the fourteenth century, 1300 to 1320, when the breath of a new age began to make itself faintly felt, were spent the years of his mature manhood, the years which saw his exile

from the city of Florence, his "wandering as a stranger through almost every region to which our language reaches," as he himself says, and the productions of his matured genius, the Lyrical Poems, the "Convivio," his Latin writings, and his great masterpiece, the "Divine Comedy."

It can be seen, therefore, that Dante's life is sharply divided into two unequal portions. The first and longer portion, nearly two thirds of his life, falls in the last half of the thirteenth century, and is lived wholly in Florence and its immediate neighborhood, and under comparatively comfortable material circumstances; the second and shorter portion, a full third of his life, falls in the fourteenth century and was spent in exile, mostly in northern and central Italy, and under circumstances of humiliating and "pinching poverty," but in it Dante produced the great mass of his creative work.

To understand the details of Dante's life, particularly the reasons for his exile, some knowledge of Italian political conditions is necessary. Therefore it will be well, at this point, briefly to review the lines of historical development which throw light on those conditions.

Florence itself was bubbling and seething with new life—that young new life of commerce and industry which had already raised the middle classes of the northern Italian cities into European prominence. It had given them wealth, organization, influence, and set them at successful war against the anarchic feudal nobility which had hindered their progress. They had become factors in the tangled web of forces that strove for political mastery in the distressful Italy of that period.

At the center of this web of intrigue sat the triple-tiaraed Popes, ever watchful for the undying interests of their sacred spouse, the Body of Christ, the Church of God on earth. They were eager to build up an independent political

state. They strove with all the spiritual and worldly weapons at their command to prevent the growth of any political power in Italy superior to their own. If the Popes themselves were not to be masters of a united Italy, nobody else should.

This dog-in-the-manger policy had been that of the papacy for ages, even from the time when the Lombards, filing over the Julian Alps, had wrenched the valley of the Po, the valley of the Arno, and parts of central and southern Italy from the weakening grip of the sore beset emperors of the Eastern Roman Empire seated at Constantinople. But the Lombards, unfortunately for the peace of Italy, were not quite strong enough to seize the entire peninsula. The Pope was able to maintain a practical independence up and down the basin of the Tiber, while the cities of the southern coasts, controlled by the sea-power of Constantinople, remained under the Eastern Empire. Italy was thus broken up into three sections, of which the Lombards controlled the northern, the Popes the central section, running diagonally across the peninsula and reaching sometimes to Ravenna, while the southern third was largely in the hands of the Eastern Emperors, who also retained control of Sicily. The mastery of the northern and southern portions changed hands many times, but the Popes through fair and foul weather always maintained their hold on the central strip or some portion of it.

In the early days when the Lombards threatened to take Rome, the papal policy discovered protectors in the distant Frankish kings. These rulers destroyed the Lombard dynasty, annexed the Lombard kingdom, and greatly increased the territorial power of the papacy. Then the papacy, claiming the right to depose and elect emperors, declared the throne of the empire vacant, and conferred the Imperial title upon the greatest of the Frankish kings,

Charlemagne. A century later the title to the empire, now known as the Holy Roman Empire, passed to the kings of Germany, who were disposed to exercise a real governing power in Italy. Thus the Popes found they had raised up a new enemy, and thereupon began the long contest of the empire and papacy that filled the annals of two hundred years, from the middle of the eleventh to the middle of the thirteenth century, 1050–1250.

The last part of the struggle, which came to an end shortly before Dante was born, and the echoes of which continued to resound in Italy while he was growing to manhood, was particularly bitter. The severity of this period of the struggle was due to a combination of causes. The most important factor was the union in one person both of the Imperial title and of the crown of the kingdom of southern Italy and Sicily. This situation called forth the utmost efforts of the Popes, for it made the prospect of the unification of Italy under a strong master alarmingly imminent. A second factor which embittered the struggle was the character of the man who controlled the combined resources of the empire and the kingdom. This man was Frederick II, the son of Henry VI, and the grandson of Frederick Barbarossa, all of the house of Hohenstaufen. Born in Sicily and bred in that semi-oriental atmosphere, strongly influenced by Arabic culture, Frederick was feared both as a political antagonist and as a free-thinking enemy of the Christian faith itself. And the papacy, too, for the greater part of the period was led by strong men and great haters, notable among them Gregory IX (1227–1241) and Innocent IV (1243–1254). It was Innocent who at the great Council of Lyons in 1245 finally declared Frederick deposed both from the empire and the kingdom, and released Frederick's subjects from their oaths of fidelity to

him. Yet it was one thing to declare Frederick deposed and another thing to take his kingdoms away from him. For five years after the Council of Lyons till his death in 1250 Frederick held his own. But after his death the rival forces which the Popes called into the field brought death and destruction to all Frederick's descendants, and his possessions both in Germany and Italy passed into other hands.

In Italy the chief agent of the Popes' wrath was Charles of Anjou, the able brother of the great and glorious St. Louis of France, the last of the crusading kings. The summoning of Charles marked a turning-point in the history both of the papacy and Italy. Before this act, for nearly three hundred years the German kings had exercised a predominant influence in Italian affairs. From now on, for many a year, French influence was to be all powerful in the peninsula. The young French monarchy, compact and aggressive, a new force in a new age, was ready to play a leading part on the stage from which the German kingship, defeated in Italy and torn by anarchic feudalism at home, was retiring. The German kings were still to claim the Imperial title, but with no resources to rely on at home they were never again able to exercise any effective control over Italian affairs. The forces of the new day were with France, and henceforth the empire was to be but a name, and Italian unity a dream. Yet while this fact is apparent to us as we look back into the past, it was hidden from the men of that day who lived through the transition and to whom and to whose fathers the empire had been a name to conjure with. It is not strange, therefore, that even Dante's all-penetrating mind should have failed to divine the future, and that he should have clung passionately to the hope of a revival of the empire.

But to return briefly to Charles of Anjou and the story

of his triumph over the sons of Frederick. Upon Charles was conferred by the Pope as suzerain the crown of the kingdom of southern Italy and Sicily. And Charles, aided by the papal resources of men and money, marched southward against Manfred, who, for some sixteen years since the death of his father and that of his elder brother Charles, had been brilliantly maintaining the Hohenstaufen cause in the south. Manfred's romantic career has always had a fascination for later generations, for he is a gallant and attractive figure, and his life was full of daring deeds. Along with many less worthy characters of the time he wins an immortality in Dante's pages. Yet Manfred fell before the sword of Charles upon the plain of Benevento.

This battle of Benevento, in 1266, fought when Dante was scarcely a year old, was the first of the two great contests by which Charles of Anjou broke the Hohenstaufen power. After the destruction of Manfred there yet remained alive one scion of Frederick's line. This was his grandson, the young boy Curradino, barely fifteen years of age. He was still in Germany, but he soon gathered forces, and, in the fashion of his ancestors, came marching over the Alps. Joyously received by the fickle Roman populace, he marched eastward from Rome up into the Apennines, where Charles awaited him. Here in August, 1268, near Tagliacozzo, in the center of the peninsula, the two forces joined battle. For a while victory seemed almost in the grasp of Curradino, but the tide of battle turned and Charles's forces swept the field. Curradino fled, but was ultimately caught, imprisoned, tried, and executed. Thus tragically was the line of Frederick brought to naught; the Pope was triumphant over the empire, and the French line was installed in the kingdom of southern Italy and Sicily.

Yet the power of the French in the south did not remain

wholly uncontested. They were foreigners, their rule was harsh, and became increasingly unpopular, especially in Sicily. In that island, after sixteen years, dissatisfaction finally reached the exploding point, and there ensued a terrible massacre of the French. This spontaneous uprising of March 30, 1282, has passed into history as the Sicilian Vespers. It initiated a revolt which, aided by the royal house of Aragon, ended in depriving the French ruler of Sicily, and putting it under the control of the Spanish kings of Aragon. This change was not without a touch of poetic justice, for in the veins of the house of Aragon flowed the blood of the Hohenstaufens, derived from the marriage of Manfred's daughter Constance with Peter of Aragon. Frederick, the youngest son of King Pedro and the grandson of Manfred, was finally securely seated on the throne.

This change occurred when Dante was passing into his seventeenth year. And this balance of power in the south remained unchanged during the rest of his life. The Spanish descendants of Manfred remained firmly seated in Sicily; Charles of Anjou died in 1285, shortly after the Sicilian Vespers, but was succeeded by his son, Charles II, 1285–1329, and his grandson, Robert, who reigned in southern Italy from 1309–1343; to all three of these men Dante makes reference in one or another of his writings.

Throughout this period the Popes continued their ancient policy of attempting to build up their own territorial possessions while preventing the development of any rival power. Their greatest rival was now the French ruler of the southern kingdom, even though, fortunately for the Popes, Sicily had been taken from him. The papal policy sought to keep the French ruler strong enough to serve as support against any danger which might threaten, but weak enough not to be a danger himself. Yet a greater danger

was the growth of French influence in general, and against this and the long arm of the French monarchy the papacy proved unable to defend itself. The ultimate defeat and degradation of the papacy took place during the early period of Dante's exile, and was the single greatest political event that took place in Dante's lifetime, though in terms of personal emotion it perhaps did not mean as much to him as the failure of Henry VII of Germany to revive the Imperial power in Italy.

The central figure in this tragic fall of the papacy is that of Benedetto Gaetano, Boniface VIII, 1294–1303, a Roman noble, connected with the papal court all the best years of his life; steeped in the ecclesiastical ambitions of centuries, imperious, passionate, and vengeful, he was an epitome of the loftiest ambitions and the worst methods of the papacy. Determined to undermine the rival influence of the Colonna family, he showered offices, castles, and lands upon his own relatives, and thus won the undying hatred of the Colonna family. They stirred up discontent in every possible quarter, allied themselves with Manfred's grandson in Sicily, and open war resulted which Boniface declared a crusade. The arrogant old Pope defeated them, captured all their castles, and drove them from the land. One among the exiles fled to the court of the king of France and became a leading agent in the final overthrow of Boniface. But before that fatal day Boniface had time to lord it over Italy, to behold thousands of pious pilgrims from all over Europe flock to Rome in answer to his declaration of a Papal Jubilee, to interfere in the affairs of Florence, and thereby directly aid in precipitating the crisis which brought about the exile of Dante. This is the great turning-point in Dante's life, but into its details I will not enter for the moment, only stopping to point out the electric contact es-

tablished for one fatal instant between the curve of the poet-politician's frail life and the mighty dynamic force of the ancient papacy.

Boniface's usurping, destructive, and futile interference in the course of Florentine history was almost his last act of power. Already before this time he had aroused the hatred of that powerful group of secularly minded men who were directing the well-knit and expanding organization of the French monarchy headed by St. Louis' grandson, King Philip the Fair. Boniface, with his eyes upon the past greatness of the ecclesiastic state as it had been directed by Innocent III a century earlier, was attempting to coerce the French state into keeping its hands off both the property and persons of the clergy. The clergy, he asserted, were subjects of no earthly monarchy; they were members only of the church of God and subject alone to the will of Christ's vicar on earth, the Pope at Rome. They were neither to be taxed nor to be subject to the jurisdiction of the royal courts unless the Pope gave express permission to such effect. Just as he was preparing to ascend the papal throne at Anagni, not far from Rome, and excommunicate Philip for his contumacy, a daring band of the king's men, guided and aided by the vengeful Colonna, entered the town, broke into the papal palace and church, insulted the defiant old man, and placed him under close arrest preparatory to trying and deposing him. Boniface, indeed, made his escape, but only to die from grief and rage. In brief space a French cardinal, subservient to the wishes of the French king, was elected, and the papal court was transferred to French soil, there to remain in Babylonian captivity for the remainder of Dante's life and for many a year thereafter. Dante had at least the satisfaction of viewing this humiliation of the author of his sufferings, to say nothing of the

magnificent revenge he took upon Boniface in the "Inferno" by burying him head downward in a pit in hell and torturing him to all eternity with balls of fire placed with nice exactitude upon the soles of his projecting and wildly struggling feet.

Thus far we have sketched the main outlines of the historical development of two of the three sections, the central and southern, into which was divided the political Italy of Dante's time. It now remains to say something of the conditions which prevailed during this same period in the third and northern section, the section which contained the great cities of the Lombard plain in the valley of the Po, and the cities of Tuscany in the valley of the Arno.

The story of these cities is an epic which relates the gradual revival of commerce and industry after the havoc and destruction wrought in the complex structure of Roman society by the various barbarian hordes that broke into Italy during the fifth and sixth centuries, the last of which were the Lombards. It was not till the eleventh century that the cities began to raise their heads. But then the middle classes, vigorously developing a reviving manufacture and trade, began to organize for the furtherance of their own particular interests. They had foes a-plenty, and the story of the succeeding centuries is a record of a continuous and increasingly successful struggle with one or other of these foes.

The first of these in most cases was the foe within their gates, the bishop of the city. The bishop, in the dark days of the Invasions, had been the staff and prop of the community, and the guidance of the city passed imperceptibly and naturally into his hands. But as the numbers, wealth, intelligence, and organized, self-conscious power of the merchant class increased, they fretted under the restrictions of

their episcopal sovereign, whose policy was too often a narrowly selfish and uncomprehending one. The citizens began, therefore, to desire to control their own affairs. This desire for independence was naturally opposed by the bishop, with the result that riots, fights, and bargaining continued to take place, until finally the bishop was either expelled neck and crop, or else yielded his claim to sovereignty in the city and agreed to let the citizens control their own affairs as they would. The Popes were interested participants in these struggles, and though frequently they supported the bishops, they often found it to their advantage to strike an alliance with the citizens. Thus, from the very beginning of their independent careers, the cities found themselves drawn into the complicated web of Italian politics, in which the dominant and controlling force was always the papacy.

The second foe with whom the cities were compelled to cross swords was the foe without their gates, usually immediately without their gates. This was the feudal noble, a type whose roots ran back in many cases to the great landed proprietor of the last days of the Roman Empire, and whose growth in numbers and power had been greatly favored by the disturbed conditions which had so long prevailed in Italy. Ensconced in their castles of stone, dotting hilltop and mountain-side and commanding all the routes of traffic by road and river, the feudal noble had become largely a law unto himself and a terrible pest to the traveling merchant, from whom he arbitrarily took toll and tariff, and whom he often deprived both of property and life. Against these foes the cities now began an incessant warfare and gradually wore them down and compelled the nobles to accept the terms which they dictated. The terms usually imposed compelled the nobles to abandon their

castles and take up their residence inside the city itself, and to register as members of one of the various guilds if they wished to run for a public office. This broke up their power of interfering with traffic on the highways, but enabled them to become disturbing factors in the life of the cities themselves. For once inside the city, they built fortified residences, surmounted by those lofty battlemented towers which thrust themselves so conspicuously on the eye in contemporary pictures of all these medieval Italian towns. The nobles brought with them their habits of lawless strife, jealous feuds, and private warfare. Worse still, they involved the whole mass of the citizenry in these struggles, the richer merchants and the proletariat taking sides with one or the other of the co ıtestants. These family interests, furthermore, became in ɔolved in the strife of political parties already sufficiently rabid and violent in themselves, for the guilds of the artisans were already at strife with the older and wealthier organizations of the merchants over matters of suffrage and the spoils of office. Hence arose a crisscrossing of party lines and a welter of party strife that render the internal history of any one of these Italian cities a series of kaleidoscopic changes most puzzling and baffling to him who seeks to present any connected narrative of their development.

Yet the conquest of the bishop and the noble did not exhaust the list of the city's enemies. The removal of these foes brought the cities face to face with each other. The rivalry of trade, so fruitful a cause of wars from the earliest recorded times down through the fateful days of July, 1914, and on to the present moment, operated with its fullest effect among these miniature commonwealths. The desire to control routes of trade, markets, and sources for the supply of raw material, the determination to crush a trade

rival, induced neighbor to fight neighbor, and produced a network of alliances and counter-alliances.

And finally the cities had to face the ever-present danger of subjection by the major power of the German kings, who, as emperors, claimed sovereign rights over the whole Italian peninsula. This danger, whenever it became imminent, generally induced the dropping of hostile rivalry for the time being and brought the cities into an alliance against the common foe. And such an alliance could always count upon papal backing, if, indeed, papal diplomacy had not actually brought it into existence. Yet some cities feared the ambitions of the Pope more than those of the emperor, and thus conflicting interests separated the cities into two major groups, those opposed to the emperor and favoring the Pope, and those opposed to the Pope and favoring the emperor. It was to these two groups that, in the early thirteenth century, the famous party names of "Guelf" and "Ghibelline" became attached, the former being applied to supporters of the Popes, and the latter to the allies of the emperors. Yet these two groups were not constant quantities, for individual cities, as their interests dictated, shifted back and forth from one group to the other. Nor did these divisions stop at the city walls. The very individuals of a given city were often divided among themselves, so that the rivalries of Guelf and Ghibelline served also to rend the citizenry into additional jealous factions.

These conditions of intense internal factional strife, coupled with the need for unity and military leadership in the wars fought outside the city walls, compelled the cities to adopt a peculiar custom, namely, the practice of calling in from the outside some able leader unconnected with any of the parties in a given city, and entrusting to him supreme executive power for a shorter or longer period. Such an

officer, usually called a *podestà,* was supposed to hold the balance evenly and justly between parties, carry out internal improvements, and lead the united forces of the city to battle. These officers in practice often did well what was expected of them; often, however, they abused the opportunities thus given them and tried to make themselves permanent dictators and absolute rulers over the city they were supposed to be serving.

Such were the general political conditions in the midst of which Dante's lot was cast. It now remains to show more in detail just how he, in the prime of life, was caught in this maelstrom of contending interests and passions, and cast out like a piece of wreckage to float hither and thither for the rest of his life without permanent anchorage or haven.

Dante, by birth, upbringing, and tradition, belonged to the noble class, though his family possessed neither great wealth nor especial distinction. He belonged to the governing class, and lived in an atmosphere of popular political activity. To these circumstances may be traced his entrance into politics, which eventually brought upon him the penalty of exile. I think it is worth while pausing to give full emphasis to this aspect of Dante's character and life, for it is one which in most of the treatments of his career suffers somewhat from underemphasis. Dante was, indeed, preëminently a poet and a scholar, with the divine sensitiveness of the one and the insatiable intellectual curiosity of the other. But he had a power of intense concentration and capacity for hard and unremitting labor. He had the hauteur of the noble and the intellectual aristocrat. Furthermore, he held his own powers in high esteem, and justly so, and above all he was ambitious. In other words, Dante not only had the capacities of poet and scholar, he had also

the capacities of a man of action. It was not only natural, therefore, it was almost inevitable, that Dante should have been drawn toward the political life of Florence, and that, once in, he should have taken the life seriously. He evidently went in with his whole soul, and with his whole soul he felt the injustice of the treatment meted out to him. This experience embittered his whole life and tinged everything he wrote thereafter.

As soon as Dante had reached the age of thirty, at which age, by Florentine law, he was first entitled to exercise the full right of citizenship, he qualified for the higher offices in the government by enrolling himself in the Guild of Physicians and Apothecaries. Dante's choice of this guild is probably explained by the fact that books were also included among the wares dealt in by apothecaries, and by the fact that to this guild were attached those who practised the art of painting, an art which seems to have had special attractions for Dante. After this step, taken apparently early in 1295, until his exile six years later, Dante took an active interest in public affairs. It is clear that he took part in discussions in the public assemblies, and his votes on a number of important questions have been preserved. His ability was recognized, for, in 1300, we find him selected to act as ambassador to a neighboring town, San Gemignano, on a mission of considerable importance. Within a week or two of his return Dante was elected to serve as one of the six priors for the two months from the fifteenth of June to the fifteenth of August, this being at the time the highest office in the republic of Florence. Of this election Dante himself in after years wrote: "All my woes and all my misfortunes had their origin and commencement with my unlucky election to the priorate; of which priorate, although I was not worthy in respect of

worldly wisdom, yet in respect of loyalty and of years I was not unworthy of it; inasmuch as ten years had passed since the battle of Campaldino, where the Ghibelline party was almost entirely broken and brought to an end, on which occasion I was present, not inexperienced in arms, and was in great fear, and afterward greatly exultant, by reason of the varying fortunes of that battle."

Dante's priorate did, indeed, occur at an unlucky time, as we shall shortly see. The strife between Guelf and Ghibelline, so far as Florence was concerned, had, to be sure, in great part subsided. With the overthrow of Frederick II and his sons Charles and Manfred by Charles of Anjou, the Imperial cause had received its death-blow. Everywhere throughout northern Italy the Guelf party, supported by the Pope and Charles of Anjou, obtained the ascendancy. This was particularly true of Florence and Tuscany in general, where, with the aid of a leader and eight hundred horsemen sent them by Charles, the Guelfs compelled the Ghibellines in large numbers to flee from Florence and most of the Tuscan cities. Thus the Guelfs were solidly in the ascendant all during Dante's boyhood and youth. Not until he was nearly twenty-five years of age did the Ghibellines make a strong effort to come back. This was at the battle of Campaldino, in 1289, to which Dante refers in the passage just quoted. There the Ghibellines were badly defeated and the Guelfs in Florence became stronger than ever.

Yet peaceful unity could not last long in any Italian city of this period, least of all in Florence. Indeed, it was not long before the Guelfs themselves were split into two hostile factions. These factions were known as the *Blacks* and the *Whites,* and originated in the neighboring city of Pistoja, which was dependent politically on Florence. In that city

a feud had arisen between two branches of the Cancellieri, a Guelf family who were descended from the same sire but by different mothers. These two branches adopted distinctive names, the one being known as the Cancellieri Bianchi, or White Cancellieri, as being descended from Cancellieri's wife Bianca, the other as the Cancellieri Neri, or Black Cancellieri. The strong feeling of rivalry broke out at last into actual hostilities as the result of an atrocious act on the part of a certain youth named Focaccia. Focaccia, angered at what he deemed an insult to his father, seized the offending youth, his own cousin, dragged him into a stable, and cut off his hand on the manger. Not content with this, Focaccia sought out the boy's father, his own uncle, and murdered him. This crime led to reprisals, and in a short time the whole city was in an uproar. One half the citizens sided with the Whites, the other half with the Blacks, so that Pistoja was reduced to a state of civil war. To put an end to this state of things the Florentines intervened; in the hope of extinguishing the feud they secured the leaders of both factions and imprisoned them in Florence.

But this measure only led to the introduction of the feud among the Florentines themselves. In Florence also there happened to be two rival families, the Donati, who were of ancient lineage but in reduced circumstances, and the Cerchi, who were wealthy upstarts. The former, headed by Corso Donati, took the part of the Black Cancellieri, while the Cerchi, headed by Vieri de' Cerchi, took the part of the White Cancellieri. Thus it came about that, through the private enmities of two Pistojan and two Florentine families, Florence, which was ostensibly Guelf at the time, became divided into Black Guelfs and White Guelfs. These two divisions, which had originally been wholly unpolitical, by degrees became respectively pure Guelfs and disaffected

Guelfs, the latter, the White Guelfs, eventually throwing in their lot with the Ghibellines.

The commencement of actual hostilities in Florence between the Blacks and the Whites was due to a street brawl on the evening of May-day in the year 1300, scarcely more than a month before the beginning of Dante's priorate, between some of these same Cerchi and Donati. Two parties of young men on horseback, belonging to either side, while looking on at a dance began hustling each other. This soon led to serious fighting, during which one of the Cerchi had his nose cut off. From this time onward violent outbreaks between the two parties became frequent. It was in the midst of this electric atmosphere that Dante, who belonged to the more moderate of the two parties, the Whites, was elevated to the priorate.

At this point Pope Boniface began to interfere in the internal affairs of Florence, as many of his predecessors had done before him. His right to interfere he based on a general claim of papal supremacy over all Christian peoples and kingdoms, and upon a special claim of temporal authority. For, according to him, there was an Imperial interregnum inasmuch as he had not yet recognized the new king of Germany, Albert of Hapsburg. Furthermore, certain Guelfs of Florence, fearing lest the increasing conflicts between the Blacks and the Whites might encourage the revival of the Ghibelline party, had asked the Pope to interfere as a mediator. Accordingly Boniface sent a cardinal, Matteo d' Acquasparta, to act as peacemaker. He was instructed to follow the traditional papal policy of keeping the two parties evenly balanced so that the Pope might easily hold control. The cardinal, therefore, on arrival demanded that the offices of government be divided between the Blacks and the Whites, half to one party and half to

the other. The priors, Dante among them, refused the cardinal's demand, whereupon the cardinal put the city under an interdict. The priors then resorted to strong measures themselves: they banished the heads of both factions, including Corso Donati, *il barone* as the devoted populace called him, and Guido Cavalcanti, the poet, one of Dante's own friends, who adhered to the Whites. In the meantime the Pope had turned to France for aid against revolted Sicily, now in the hands of Frederick of Aragon, Manfred's grandson. In response to the Pope's invitation came Charles of Valois, brother of King Philip the Fair of France. When Charles reached Rome, Boniface decided to use him to coerce rebellious Florence. Boniface had by this time been won over by the Blacks, and while he sent Charles to Florence nominally as a peacemaker, he in reality was working against the Whites, to which the majority of the priors had belonged. The Whites, indeed, were bitterly opposed to the sending of Charles, and sent an embassy to Rome, in October, 1301, to protest against his coming. It is very generally believed that Dante was a member of this embassy, and that his exile was decreed in his absence and that he never entered the city of his birth again. Be that as it may, Charles arrived in Florence at the head of twelve hundred horsemen on the eighth of November, 1301. His entrance was unopposed because of his promise to hold the balance between the two parties and to maintain peace. No sooner, however, had he obtained command of the city than he treacherously espoused the cause of the Blacks, and permitted the exiled leaders of that party to return. Corso Donati and his friends burst upon the frightened Bianchi, and for five days burned and pillaged as if they were in a conquered city.

But Boniface had no mind to let Florence pass into the

hands of Charles of Valois, or in any way to let matters get beyond his control. He, therefore, sent his cardinal ambassador once more to the city, but the Blacks were as deaf to his commands as the Whites had been. They refused to divide the offices with a beaten foe, the cardinal again withdrew, and again put the city under an interdict.

The Blacks thereupon proceeded with the proscription of their enemies. On January 27, 1302, sentence was passed against Dante Alighieri and four others, all Whites, who had been previously summoned before the *podestà* but had failed to appear. All five were away from the city; Dante, as we have seen, presumably at Rome, while the rest had probably fled. Dante and his companions were falsely accused of fraud and corruption both in office and out. They were further charged with having conspired against the Pope, against the admission into the city of his representative, Charles of Valois, against the peace of the city and of the Guelf party. The real offense, needless to say, was that of being a leader of the Whites, and of having opposed the Pope and Prince Charles. The penalty was a fine of five thousand florins and the restitution of the sums illegally exacted; payment was to be made within three days of the promulgation of the sentence, in default of which all their goods were to be forfeited and destroyed. In addition to the fine, the delinquents were sentenced to banishment from Tuscany for two years, and to perpetual deprivation from office in the commonwealth of Florence.

This sentence having been disregarded, on the tenth of March of the same year a second, severer sentence was pronounced, condemning them to be burned alive should they ever be caught. Other prosecutions followed; more than six hundred of the Bianchi were banished, their goods confiscated, and their houses burned.

Thus was Dante's public career blasted and the whole course of his life changed by the chance which brought his unbending character in opposition to the tortuous policy of the papacy wielded by the overweening Boniface. Yet, though for the next twenty years Dante was to "prove how salt the taste is of another's bread, and how hard a path it is to go up and down another's stairs," posterity cannot regard his exile as an unmixed evil. For who shall say, had Dante been left to pursue the life he was leading, possibly becoming more than ever involved in public affairs, certainly with a totally different experience of life than that which he actually had, that the "Divine Comedy" would ever have seen the light of day, at least in anything like the form it actually has.

Of the details of Dante's movements during the twenty-odd years of his exile not much is known. That he was pretty constantly on the move is clear, rarely staying more than a year or two consecutively at any one place. Mostly he spent his time in northern Italy, often quite close to Florence. Once only did he leave Italy, when apparently he made a short trip to France, studying for a while at Paris. But of the exact time of this trip and its details nothing is known. Of the general conditions under which this period of his life was spent Dante himself has given us a short sketch than which no better can be given.

In a passage at the beginning of the "Convivio" he says:

> Alas, would it had pleased the Dispenser of the Universe that I should never have had to make excuses for myself; that neither others had sinned against me, nor I had suffered this punishment unjustly, the punishment I say of exile and poverty! Since it was the pleasure of the citizens of the fairest and most renowned daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me out from her most sweet bosom (wherein I was born and brought up to the climax of my life, and wherein I long with all my heart, with their good leave, to repose my wearied spirit,

and to end the days allotted to me), wandering as a stranger through almost every region to which our language reaches, I have gone about as a beggar, showing against my will the wound of fortune, which is often wont to be imputed unjustly to the fault of him who is stricken. Verily I have been as a ship without sails and without rudder, driven to various harbors and shores by the parching wind which blows from pinching poverty. And I have appeared vile in the eyes of many who, perhaps from some report of me, had imagined me in a different guise.

Through the first half of this period Dante's dominant hope and aim was to return to Florence. To this end he at first associated himself with the others who had been exiled with him and who now had thrown in their lot with the members of the Ghibelline party. But the petty and foolish conduct of the exiles disgusted him, and he soon drew apart from them to pursue his own line of conduct. To this episode in his career he refers in the "Paradiso" (xxvii, 61–69):

> But that shall gall thee most,
> Will be the worthless and vile company,
> With whom thou must be thrown into these straits.
> For all ungrateful, impious all, and mad,
> Shall turn 'gainst thee: but in a little while,
> Theirs and not thine shall be the crimsoned brow.
> Their course shall so evince their brutishness,
> To have ta'en thy stand apart shall well become thee.

For a time Dante dissociated himself from efforts to effect a return by violence and hoped for a spontaneous recall by the government of the city. Meanwhile there developed and grew strong within him a love for Italy which his detached position enabled him to view as a whole. He saw the country torn by internecine strife, and he longed to see the warring parties united and at peace. The one and only hope of accomplishing such unity lay, he decided,

in a revival and restoration of the power of the empire. For the political power of the papacy, which had brought about his own ruin, he had no love. Dante thus became a convinced and thoroughgoing Ghibelline. He longed to see a German king come down once more across the Alps, and, keeping himself above party, bring together the struggling members of Italy into one harmonious body. It was, therefore, with unbounded joy and hope that he followed the career of Henry of Luxemburg, elected and crowned king of Germany in 1308 as Henry VII.

Henry early showed his determination to reassert the Imperial authority in Italy, which had to all intents and purposes lapsed since the death of the last Hohenstaufen, two generations before. Henry crossed the Alps and appeared in Italy in January, 1311. Dante was filled with high hopes. Along with ambassadors from nearly every city in Italy he was present at Milan when Henry was crowned king. He addressed a letter to the princes and peoples of Italy urging them to submit to the leadership of Henry. "Lo! now is the acceptable time," he writes, "wherein arise the signs of consolation and peace. For a new day is beginning to break . . . and confirms the hopes of the peoples with a peaceful calm." But his own beloved city, Florence, remained aloof, and, secretly encouraged by the Pope, became head and front of the opposition to the new emperor. This stirred Dante to the fury of his letter to the Florentines threatening them with the direct vengeance of the emperor. "You," he thundered, "you, who transgress every law of God and man, and whom the insatiable maw of avarice urges headlong into every crime, does not the dread of the second death haunt you, seeing that you first and you alone, refusing the yoke of liberty, have set yourselves against the glory of the Roman emperor, the king

of the earth and the servant of God? . . . If my prophetic spirit be not deceived, your city, worn out with long sufferings, shall be delivered at the last into the hands of the stranger, after the greatest part of you has been destroyed in death or in captivity, and the few that shall be left to endure exile shall witness her downfall with weeping and lamentation."

Dante later even urged the emperor to lay aside all other undertakings and press the siege of Florence. And finally the emperor did come, though Dante would not accompany him, since he did not wish to witness the overthrow of his beloved city. But Florence withstood the siege, and not long after the emperor himself died.

With him fell Dante's hopes of a reunited Italy and of a return to Florence, for his fierce championship of the Imperial cause had raised bitter feeling against him in Florence. So bitter, indeed, was the feeling that in August, 1315, a fresh sentence was pronounced against him and the other exiles, this time including his sons. In the next year, however, an amnesty was declared and permission granted for the majority of the exiles to return under certain degrading conditions, including the payment of a fine and performance of penance in the Baptistery. Yet from this amnesty Dante and a number of others were excluded. Many of the exiles appear to have accepted the terms, but Dante, who seems at first to have been unaware of his exclusion, magnificently rejected them.

"Is this, then," he wrote to a friend in Florence, "is this the generous recall of Dante Alighieri to his native city, after the miseries of nearly fifteen years of exile? Is this the reward of innocence manifest to all the world, of unceasing toil and sweat in study? Far be it from the friend of philosophy, so senseless a degradation, befitting only a

soul of clay, as to submit himself to be paraded like a prisoner, as some infamous wretches have done! . . . No! this is not the way for me to return to my country. If another can be found which does not derogate from the fame and honor of Dante, that will I take with no lagging steps. But if by no such way Florence may be entered, then will I reënter Florence never."

Thus ended the episode of Henry VII and thus ended Dante's hopes of return to Florence. The mainstay and support of Dante during his years of exile had been the various nobles of the Ghibelline party scattered throughout northern Italy, and it is with two of these that Dante spent the remaining years of his life. For a year or two Dante lived at Verona with his friend Can Grande della Scala, the greatest soldier of his time, and with whom Dante was on terms of close intimacy. The last three or three and a half years of his life Dante spent in peace and happiness at Ravenna, protected and comfortably supported by the lord of that city, Guido Novella da Polenta. Here he was joined by his sons Pietro and Jacopo and his daughter Beatrice. Here he lived amid congenial company, and put the finishing touches to the "Divine Comedy," his work upon which "had made him lean for many years." The publication of the "Inferno" and "Purgatorio" had already made Dante famous, and he now was invited to receive the laurel crown at Bologna. This honor, however, he declined, saying that he wished to receive it from Florence or not at all. Early in 1321 he took part in an embassy from Ravenna to Venice. The party was compelled to return by land along the malarious seaboard. During this journey Dante is supposed to have contracted a fever, as a result of which he died at Ravenna soon after his return. He was buried with great honor in that city, and there, in spite of all efforts on the

part of Florence to recover his body, under a splendid tomb his remains still lie.

In surveying the life of Dante one question inevitably obtrudes itself. How did he do his work? How amidst the distressing circumstances of his life, with its frequent changes of abode, could he find time and peace of mind to compose lyrical poems and eclogues, dissertations like the "Convivio" and "De Monarchia," and a magnum opus like the "Divine Comedy"? The answer is to be found, I suppose, in these very circumstances themselves. For just as at the death of Beatrice Dante sought consolation in study, so in his exile he found his chief relief from the pressure of outward circumstance in the delights of study, reflection, and composition. The warlike but cultured nobility with which he found refuge supplied him with the means of study and often with congenial and sympathetic companionship. His own genius, combined with industry and drive, enabled him to make the most of these conditions. And these conditions and all the bitter experience of Dante's life have left indelible traces on every page of the "Divine Comedy."

It was Dante's fate to become entangled and thrown by an intricate political net whose meshes were woven partly out of the waning medieval forces of the papacy, the empire, and feudalism, and partly out of the waxing modern forces of the city bourgeoisie. Yet fate spared his life, and as a result Dante has left posterity an incomparably valuable record of his times. That work has crystallized for us the finest fruit of the Middle Ages, and at the same time reveals an individuality thoroughly modern in its independence of mind and in its quick readiness along some lines to apply the solvent of reason to the restricting bonds of tradition and authority.

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